

the 16th April the last of them disappeared. To the last both species of babblers attended to the young.

The exact reason for this behaviour of the babblers is not known. The two species differ in size, colour and vocalizations. The Whiteheaded Babbler is more often seen in open areas with little or no cover of trees and shrubs, but both species often forage together and we have observed a Whiteheaded Babbler foraging with a flock of Jungle Babbler continuously for six months. In our study area both species of birds are constantly disturbed by the construction of new buildings and by firewood gatherers, and the home ranges of both species of babblers change from time to time.

In the present case we could not spot the nest at the time of building. It is possible

that the Jungle Babblers also had built a nest at about the same time as the other species and at a spot close by and lost it. They may then have forced the Whiteheaded Babblers out of their nest and taken possession. Both species build similar nests and their eggs have the same colour. Both are parasitised by cuckoos and thus conditioned to accept alien chicks. In the coming months we hope to shift eggs from one species of babbler to the other to study their response.

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### 11. PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRDS AS FOSTER PARENTS

In the second week of August 1976, in an open plot in Vithalwadi, about 3 km from the centre of Poona City, a nest of a Purplerumped Sunbird was seen hanging from a twig of a *Caesalpinia sepiaria* bush. The nest was at a height of about 5 ft from the ground.

When the nest was first located, it contained two eggs. The eggs were white speckled with brown and in size equivalent to Redvented Bulbul's eggs. The female sunbird was seen incubating the eggs.

A chick was first seen inside the nest on 26th August. It was dark brown in colour and

appeared rather big for a sunbird's chick. The shape of its beak was also different. How the other egg was disposed off was not known; neither did we find the shell of the hatched egg. The possibility of brood parasitism had not occurred to us then.

On 16th September it was observed that the entrance hole was enlarged and the chick was not inside the nest. On an adjacent acacia (babul) tree the female sunbird was seen feeding the chick which was now of the size of a redvented bulbul minus tail. Its colour was dark grey with brown spots on the chest. The

gape was rich scarlet red. Wings were short and tail feathers undeveloped. It was weakly calling *chee, chee*, the call becoming harsher on the arrival of the foster parents. Almost every five minutes it was being fed by the female sunbird. The female was seen picking up something from near the acacia blossom. Evidently it could not be nectar for there is none in babul flowers. She was, however, observed to be bringing in nectar from the loranthus flowers. The female would sit by the side of the chick and feed it by inserting its beak into the open mandibles of the chick. The chick would quiver its wings and tail during feeding. The chick was seen flying from one tree to another within a radius of 10 to 15 feet from the nest. As the chick and the parents were not coming back to the nest, it was removed by us.

In the last week of September both the parents were seen feeding the chick; the frequency of feeding had increased to about every two minutes. Again, the sunbirds were seen pecking at tender twigs of babul. The tail of the young bird had become long and its colour lighter. The chest had become cross-barred with dark brown. The tail was also lightly barred with white and brown. It had

become more active and could fly over a greater distance.

The chick was last seen on 30th September. In size it was bigger than a redvented bulbul. In colour it was grey with a lighter chest cross-barred with dark brown. Tail feathers were long and barred with white and dark grey. Its flight was like a large grey babbler's quick wing beats followed by a glide. It was low and silent. The sunbirds were still engaged in feeding it. The chick could not be located again in the same area after 30th September.

Other birds seen nesting in the same open plot were: Ashy Wren Warbler, Tailor Bird, Whitethroated Munia, Baya Weaver Bird, and Redvented Bulbul.

The following parasitic cuckoos were seen in the vicinity of the nest: Koel (quite common), Pied Crested Cuckoo, Hawk-cuckoo (uncommon) and Plaintive Cuckoo. The last was seen perching on the bush bearing the sunbirds' nest, only once, i.e. on 23rd September.

In the second week of October a member of the Nature Club in National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, also recorded a sunbird feeding a large bird. The NDA is situated across the river at a distance of six to seven miles from Vithalwadi.

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## 12. ASSISTED MIGRATION OF BIRDS BY SHIPS

On 18th September 1975, I sailed for England from Cochin as a passenger on board an Indian cargo ship. Two days out at sea from Cochin, I noticed two pairs and a single Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) on the mast of the ship. At times, the birds flew away from the

ship apparently in search of land, but returned back always. Thinking that the birds will thirst and starve to death, I put out grain and water but was told by the sailors that there was no need to do so. There were enough pickings on the aft deck outside the kitchen